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FM AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4045
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUFOAOA/USNIC SARAJEVO PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 001695

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EUR (DICARLO), D (SMITH), P (BAME), EUR/SCE (HOH, SAINZ, FOOKS), NSC FOR BRAUN, USNIC FOR WEBER, GREGORIAN, OSD FOR FLORY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/28/2016

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SUBJECT: BIH REACTIONS TO THE CRISIS IN THE MIDDLE EAST:
POLITICAL PLOY OR CAUSE FOR CONCERN?

Classified By: Classified by A/DCM Dorothy Sarro, reason 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Israeli-Lebanese crisis, and the broader Middle East conflict are garnering an increasing amount of public and political attention in BiH. Government statements and media reports are generally factual and correct, but some local public figures have begun to manipulate the Israel-Lebanon crisis for domestic political gain. Media reaction in some quarters has become increasingly critical of the United States and the international community. On July 29, a local youth-based humanitarian organization will hold an anti-war demonstration, which police expect to be peaceful and attract in the range of 100 people. END SUMMARY.

GOVERNMENT AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS' STATEMENTS GENERALLY
BALANCED

¶2. (C) On July 21, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) released a press statement calling for an immediate ceasefire and urging international intervention to prevent further suffering and casualties among the civilian Lebanese population. It went on to say that BiH condemns all forms of terrorism and extremism. The MFA urged a return to negotiations for a lasting peace in the Middle East that would ensure the continued existence of the State of Israel, while also granting Palestinians their own state and restoring stability to Lebanon. On July 27, the BiH House of Peoples (HoP) adopted a resolution proposed by the Bosniak Caucus urging the international community and the UN Security Council to take necessary measures to secure an all-encompassing and just peace in the Middle East. The resolution also urged the UN to provide humanitarian aid to unspecified "unsafe areas" and called on BiH authorities, NGOs and citizens to participate in collecting aid.

¶3. (C) At Friday prayers on July 21, Reis-ul-Ulema Mustafa ef. Ceric, leader of the Bosnian Islamic Community, called on the world to stop the war in the Middle East and to prevent the further suffering of innocent civilians in Lebanon, Palestine and Israel. He added, however, his concern that some people have the right to defend themselves by killing innocent civilians while others have no right to even harvest their own land. (We interpret this as an allusion to Israel and its military might versus that of the Palestinians and Lebanese, and a thinly-veiled message of sympathy for the more extremist Islamic elements within the wider Islamic Community of BiH.)

THE MIDDLE EAST AS A DOMESTIC POLITICAL FOIL

14. (C) Reactions to the Middle East conflict also are playing out in local political rhetoric. Hasan Cengic, a member of the extremist wing of President Tihic's Party of Democratic Action (SDA) and HoP delegate, spoke out against Tihic in the final pre-holiday session of the HoP July 27. Cengic "asked" Tihic nine questions in his speech, most of which centered on the sale of weapons by Bosnia to Iraq. The attack was a transparent attempt to paint Tihic as "anti-Islamic" for contributing to the continued bloodshed in the Middle East, and by doing so, undermining Tihic's presidential candidacy and authority within SDA. (Note: Cengic's outburst is particularly noteworthy as he was one of the most notorious arms smugglers during the Bosnian war, working closely with the Iranians to supply the Bosnian army. Cengic was the subject of a major scandal last year after a Bosnian court acquitted him of charges connected to his wartime activities. End Note.)

EDITORIALS INCREASINGLY CRITICAL

15. (C) Contrary to its tendency to minimize coverage of world events that do not impact BiH or the region directly, the Bosnian public, government and media are paying increasing attention to the Israel-Lebanon conflict. Media reaction in some quarters has become more critical recently of the United States and the international community. Initially, media attention focused almost exclusively on the humanitarian aspect of the crisis rather than the politics behind it. Although there has been virtually no sophisticated analysis of the crisis in the media, there has been a recent increase in media-driven criticism against the United States (and other international actors) claiming that the international community has not done enough to broker a

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ceasefire and stop the bloodshed.

16. (C) Media reaction to the Reis's July 21 sermon has been harsh in some circles. An editorial in Dani magazine (an influential weekly newsmagazine, not widely-distributed outside of urban areas and frequently critical of U.S. foreign policy) slammed the Reis for his comments, saying that Bosnians should be ashamed of the Reis's sermon because he failed to adequately criticize Israel for attacking one of the least powerful nations in the world. Pecanin also chastized the U.S. for its attitude toward the conflict, going as far as to say that "only the naive believe that President Bush is as stupid as he looks and is not aware of the consequences of open American support to the newest crimes of the State of Israel." Pecanin continues that by not forcing a ceasefire, "there can now be no dilemma about America's true strategy in the Middle East...the global radicalization of Muslims as an excuse for future military interventions using today the Iraq and Lebanon scenario, tomorrow Syria, shortly thereafter Iran and then in any area where the dictatorship of American puppets comes into question."

SMALL ANTI-WAR PROTEST PLANNED IN SARAJEVO

17. (U) In protest against the current crisis in the Middle East, the Bosnian-based Democratic Youth Movement (DOP) has scheduled an anti-war demonstration in Sarajevo for July 29. Specifically, the group rallies Bosnians - who all too well understand the cost of war - to "show the world that (we) disagree with the violence and killing of innocent children in Lebanon." The DOP describes itself as a student-based humanitarian organization founded as an advocacy group for the youth of BiH in all areas of society. The organization's mission is to encourage young Bosnians to take an active role in the future of BiH and is active in charity work to combat drug addiction and other maladies that plague Bosnian youth. Sarajevo police anticipate a peaceful crowd of approximately 100 protestors.

18. (C) COMMENT: The harsh criticism from Senad Pecnanin, Dani's editor-in-chief, is notable because Pecanin is not a nationalist or Islamist by nature, and in the past has been threatened by Islamic radicals for his work in exposing and criticizing the role of foreign Mujahedin in the Bosnian war. On the political front, Cengic's outspoken statement in the HoP is symptomatic of the overall cleavage in the Bosniak political community, represented best by the rivalry between Tihic and Party for BiH (SBiH) Presidential candidate Haris Silajdzic. Right-wing Bosniaks are using the Middle East Crisis and the Iraq war (along with the domestic issue of constitutional reform) as a foil to illustrate differences between Silajdzic and those who support him and moderate Bosniaks like Tihic and Social Democratic Party (SDP) Leader Zlatko Lagumdzija (who is facing attacks for being a "Communist" and a "traitor" to Islam because of the investigation and prosecution of some SDA wartime leaders when his coalition was in power from 2000-2002.) Post has seen no evidence that these political attacks are anything but domestic pre-election politicking, but will continue to track carefully reaction here to the situation in the Middle East. END COMMENT.
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